

Mound City, Illinois

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In 1855 the Emporium Real Estate and Manufacturing Company was organized for the purpose of building a great and thriving metropolis in southern Illinois on the Ohio River. The company received \$1,500,000, came to Illinois, purchased a large section of land near the newly platted town of Mound City, and named its development Emporium City. The financial backers from large cities in the East had big hopes for the city. In the original plan, there was even room for the capital of the United States. The company built several warehouses, a foundry, houses, and a shipyard. The company soon went bankrupt, however. In 1857, Emporium City and Mound City joined together under the name Mound City. The newly formed town soon grew quickly and served important purposes in the Civil War.

The shipyard or marine ways the Company completed in 1859 was then sold to Hambleton, Collier & Company. The first boat built at the ways was the *R.H.W. Hill*. From 1861 to 1874 the Hambleton Company leased the ways to the United States government for \$40,000 a year. The ways were used to build and repair ships and convert steamers into armored vessels. Three famous ironclad gunboats built there in 1861, under the supervision of James Eads, were the U.S.S. *Cairo*, the U.S.S. *Mound City*, and the U.S.S. *Cincinnati*. These gunboats were used soon to help facilitate the Union victories at such important places as Fort Henry and Fort Donelson. Some of the boats repaired at the shipyards were the U.S.S. *Essex*, the U.S.S. *Pittsburgh*, U.S.S. *Lexington*. U.S.S.

Eastport and the U.S.S. *Carondelet*. Andrew H. Foote's flagship, the U.S.S. *Benton* was also serviced at the ways. At its height during the Civil War, the ways employed as many as fifteen hundred men. In addition, in 1863 the U. S. Navy's Mississippi River Squadron moved to Mound City. The fleet included one hundred gunboats, twenty-two transports, thirty-two mortar boats, and eight tugs.

In 1874, the United States government gave the Mound City Marine Ways back to its owner. Even though the buildings of the shipyard burned down in 1879, construction at the ways continued until the 1970s. Altogether, "Twenty-seven large ships and as many as 6,000 floating structures were built at the shipyards...", according to one account. Today, all that remains of the ways from the Civil War era are some sliding ramps, rails, and some concrete foundations. In 2001 the area was placed on the state's top ten most endangered historic sites.

Also affiliated with Mound City during the Civil War is the famous U.S.S. *Red Rover*, the first hospital ship of the United States Navy. This side-wheel steamer was built at Cape Girardeau, Missouri, and bought by the Confederacy in 1861. After it was hit by a Union ship and run aground to avoid sinking in 1862, the crew of the U.S.S. *Mound City* captured it and made temporary repairs so that it could be towed. The ship was refitted as a hospital ship in new, innovative ways. The overseer of the project once wrote, "I wish you could see our hospital boat, the *Red Rover*, with all her comforts for sick and disabled seamen. ...and is in every way a decided success." Commissioned at Mound City, the *Red Rover* entered service on June 1862. In a July 1862 battle in Arkansas, when the gunboat *Mound City* was struck and many were injured, the *Red Rover* transported thirty-seven of them to the Mound City Naval Hospital. During the

winter of 1862, when the *Red Rover* was refitted at nearby Cairo, its patients were transferred to the Mound City Hospital. Over 1500 patients were treated aboard the ship from 1862 to 1865. A total of 1,365 of these patients were discharged, and 157 died on board. Some of the *Red Rover's* female medical personnel were the first women to officially serve aboard a naval vessel, including African-American women, some of whom had been taken on board as contraband. They were later listed on the ship's roster as naval nurses.

One of the warehouses built by the Emporium Company was converted into the Mound City Naval Hospital in 1861. In October 1861 the first of a contingent of Holy Cross nuns reported to General Grant at Cairo, and several of them served throughout the war as nurses at the hospital and on board the *Red Rover*. After the Battle of Shiloh, over 2,000 soldiers were treated there. The hospital was the largest in the Union Army's Western Campaign and the last one to close when the war ended. After the war, the Hospital served many uses. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974 but was destroyed by fire in 1976. Most of those who died in the hospital were buried near the hospital. The government bought ten acres of land near Mound City in 1862 and created the Mound City National Cemetery. The dead from the Hospital were reburied there along with 4,800 from the Civil War.

In 1861, the Pulaski County seat moved to Mound City, signifying the town's growth. Pulaski County more than doubled its population during the 1860s, in part because of the wartime efforts in Mound City.

Although now quite small, Mound City has an interesting history. Other towns of similar size have not had such a rich history as Mound City enjoys. Seeing the town

today, one might not appreciate its historical significance; however, this little southern Illinois town played an important role in the Civil War. [From "Arson-Related Fire Destroys Historic Civil War Hospital." *The Cairo Evening Citizen*, (April 29, 1976); Darwin Campbell, "Waterfront Preservation Sought at Mound City," *The Paducah Sun*, (Sept. 17, 2001); Catherine Deans-Barrett, "History of Mound City Marine Ways During CW," *The Cairo Evening Citizen*, (April 13, 1961); Travis DeNeal, "Historian Hoping Old Shipyard Makes List of Endangered Sites," *Southern Illinoisan*, (Feb. 23, 2001); William G. Farrar, "In Memoriam-Mound City Civil War Naval Hospital, ca. 1858-1976," *Historic Illinois*, (Dec. 1978); Robert M. Hurst Jr., "Marine Ways at Mound City Played Important Part in the History of This Nation." *Cairo Evening Citizen*, (Nov. 2, 1938); Jeannine Koranda, "Endangered Historic Sites," *Southern Illinoisan*, (March 21, 2001); William Nelson Movers, *Movers' Brief History of Pulaski County-1843-1943*; Ray Owen, "Endangered Status Sought for Historic Southern Illinois Shipyards," *Southeast Missourian*, (Mar. 6, 2001); William H. Perrin ed., *History of Alexander, Union, and Pulaski Counties*; Steven Louis Roca, "Presence and Precedence: the USS *Red Rover* During the Civil War, 1861-1865," *Civil War History*, June 1998; Linda Rush, *Legacies of Little Egypt*.]